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### Parental Involvement In Minors' Abortion Decisions

In a 1991 study based on a nationally representative sample of more than 1,500 unmarried minors having an abortion, 61% of the respondents said that one or both of their parents (usually the mother) knew about the abortion. Only 26% of the respondents said their father knew about the abortion; furthermore, 57% of the mothers who knew about their daughter's pregnancy did not tell her father. In this study, which was conducted in states without parental involvement laws in effect, about 75% of the parents who knew about the pregnancy had been told by the daughter herself, and the great majority supported their daughter's decision to have an abortion. Among the minors whose parents found out without being told by the minor, 18% said their parents were forcing them to have an abortion and 6% reported physical violence, being forced to leave home or damage to their parents' health. Minors who did not tell their parents were disproportionately older (aged 16 or 17), white and employed. The minors' most common reasons for not telling their parents were wanting to preserve their relationship with their parents and wanting to protect the parents from stress and conflict. Of those who did not tell their parents, 30% had experienced violence in their family, feared that violence would occur or were afraid of being forced to leave home. Among minors whose parents were unaware of the pregnancy, all consulted someone other than clinic staff about the abortion; most frequently, they consulted their boyfriend (89%), an adult (52%) or a professional (22%). (Family Planning Perspectives, 24:196, 1992)

Each year about 7% of all U.S. women aged 15-17, some 400,000 women, have a birth, abortion or miscarriage.[1] In 1988, 172,000 young women aged 17 or younger--41% of those whose pregnancy did not end in a spontaneous miscarriage obtained an abortion.[2] Despite these large numbers, only a few studies have examined the decisions made by pregnant adolescents to determine the factors associated with the choice of birth or abortion, the pressures acting on the adolescents, and the roles played by parents and other adults.

Some studies have found that pregnant adolescents are more likely to abort their pregnancy if they have high educational achievements or aspirations,[3] and one study has found that the educational level among the mothers of adolescents who have an abortion is higher than that among the mothers of those who give birth.[4] Robert Blum and Michael Resnick have reported that adolescents who choose abortion have a better ability to conceptualize the future, a greater feeling of control over life, less anxiety and a less traditional view of female sex roles than do those who decide on childbirth.[5] An investigation of decision-making competence

among women seeking a pregnancy test found that among those considering an abortion, women younger than 18 appeared as competent as legal adults aged 18-21.[6]

In a study of 432 unmarried women younger than 18 who had an unintended pregnancy ending in birth or abortion, Raye Hudson Rosen found that 57% involved their parents, usually their mother, in the pregnancy resolution decision; this proportion was about the same among those who had an abortion as it was among those who continued the pregnancy. Male partners had more influence on the decision of adolescents who decided to have and keep the baby than on those who had an abortion. The adolescents who were most likely to consult their parents were those who had difficulty making the decision.[7]

Studies of parent-child communication about sexual issues have found that such communication is often limited. In a review of 15 studies on the family's role in adolescent sexual behavior, Greer Litton Fox reported that none found that parents were a major source of information about sex for a majority of respondents.[8]

Of a sample of pregnant inner-city black minors in Baltimore, 91% said that they consulted a parent or surrogate parent before the outcome decision; the proportion was about the same for those who continued the pregnancy as for those who had an abortion.[9]

In a national survey of 1,170 unmarried minors having an abortion in 1979-1980, Aida Torres and colleagues found that 55% said that their parents knew they were having an abortion; the younger the minor, the more likely her parents were to know. Informing parents was more common among minors who had discussed birth control with their parents before they became pregnant.[10]

The purpose of this study is to obtain a deeper understanding of how unmarried minors who have induced abortions initially react to their pregnancy and how they arrive at the decision to have an abortion. The study focuses on the following topics: the minors' initial feelings about their pregnancy; the proportion who, in the absence of legal requirements, consult their parents, and the proportion of parents who find out about the pregnancy in other ways; the reasons minors do or do not consult their parents; the reactions of parents when they discover their daughter is pregnant and the consequences of this discovery; parental and other pressures to continue or terminate the pregnancy; the characteristics of minors who choose not to involve their parents; and other aspects of the process by which pregnant minors choose abortion and carry out that decision.

The questions of parental consultation and the needs of pregnant adolescents have practical importance because of proposals in state legislatures and in Congress to require parental involvement or court authorization for unemancipated minors to obtain abortions. As of August 1992, the consent of one or both parents was required in 10 states, and notification of one or both parents was required in an additional nine

states.[\*] Seventeen more states have passed parental involvement laws that have been enjoined by the courts or are not enforced for other reasons.[d] The laws have various stated purposes, among which are encouragement of family communication and assurance that minors who have an abortion receive adult guidance.

In all of the states with parental involvement laws except Utah and Idaho, minors can avoid parental involvement if they demonstrate to a court that they are mature enough to make an informed decision or that the abortion would be in their best interest.[dd] Access to courts and to impartial judges may be difficult, however. In 1985, the latest year for which data are available, about 40,000 minors obtained an abortion in the 19 states that now have such laws in effect, and about 140,000 did so in other states.[11]

This study was designed to examine the "natural" behavior of pregnant minors and to determine whom they consulted in the absence of legal constraints; thus, it was limited to minors having an abortion in states without parental notification requirements in effect. A study assessing the actual impact of parental involvement laws through comparisons between minors in states with restrictions and those in states without restrictions would be valuable but would require a much larger sample than was possible in our study, as well as accurate coverage of minors who travel from restrictive to nonrestrictive states to obtain abortions. A complete study of pregnancy decision-making that included minors who continued their pregnancy would also be valuable; this, too, was impossible, given the available resources.

## Methods

We used a self-administered questionnaire distributed in abortion facilities to collect data on minors having an abortion in states without parental notification requirements. (The questionnaire had been extensively pretested in six clinics to assure that the questions were understood and would provide the necessary information.) All facilities were in states that had no parental involvement requirements in effect as of September 1990 and were not expected to have restrictions in effect within the next nine months.[21] From a master list maintained by The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) of all abortion providers, we drew a sample of nonhospital clinics and physicians' offices where 1,000 or more abortions had been performed in 1988. Nationally, such facilities accounted for 75% of all abortions that year.[12] The sample was stratified by the country's nine census divisions.

Of the 81 facilities approached to field the survey, two were no longer providing abortion services and 26 refused to participate or were unable to give a definite acceptance. Seven more agreed to participate but could not, because they were temporarily closed or for other reasons. This left 46 facilities that provided usable questionnaires. Each facility was instructed to give the questionnaire, which was available in both English and Spanish, to all unmarried patients younger than 18 who received an abortion during a 12-week period between December 1990 and June

1991. All patients were informed that participation was voluntary and that failure to participate would not affect the care they would receive.

Of the 1,793 patients seen these facilities during the study period, 8% did not receive the questionnaire because of administrative oversight or because there was not enough time for the patient to complete it, and 1% were too physically uncomfortable to respond or were unable to answer because of a language problem. Of the remaining 1,624 patients, 94% returned a usable questionnaire.

To evaluate how representative the sample was, we used state and national abortion statistics to estimate the proportion of nonwhites among minors having an abortion in the study states. The resulting estimate (35%) was higher than the proportion among the sample respondents (26%), so the respondents were weighted to adjust the racial proportions to the external estimate. Weights were chosen to sum to the actual sample total of 1,519. Except for data included in the regressions, all data shown in tables are weighted. With the exception of Table 4, the tables do not show significance because of the numerous possible comparisons; differences are mentioned in the text only if they are statistically significant at the .05 level, taking into account the effect of weighting, which reduced the effective sample size by an estimated 6%.

The age distribution of the weighted sample of respondents is close to that found in national data collected by the Centers for Disease Control.[13] The sample was also compared with 1,115 unmarried minors in a national survey of 9,480 abortion patients conducted by AGI in 1987.[14] There were, at most, only small differences between the two studies in the weighted percentage distributions by age, employment, religion, receipt of Medicaid, and prior births and abortions. The demographic composition of our sample (weighted by race) is therefore nationally representative of all minors having an abortion, even though the sample was drawn only from states without parental involvement requirements.

## Results

Minors Having an Abortion Table 1 (page 198) provides a picture, based on the survey results, of unmarried minors who have an abortion. Although the respondents ranged in age from 12 to 17 years, 74% were either 16 or 17 years old, and only 8% were younger than 15. More than half were non-Hispanic whites, 30% were black, 12% were Hispanic (1% nonwhite, 11% white) and 4% were Asian or of another race.

Only 38% of the minors lived with both biological parents; 46% lived with their mother but not their father, 5% lived with their father but not their mother, and 12% lived with neither. Ten percent lived with a parent and stepparent; these minors were included with the 51% who lived with only one parent. Parental involvement laws usually refer only to "parents" and "guardians" and not to stepparents; thus, stepparents were not treated as parents in this study. Respondents presumably

understood the terms "mother" and "father" to refer to their biological or adoptive parents, because many questions provided for separate answers for stepparents.

Although 17% of the respondents did not live with their mother, most had some contact with her; only 2% said that they did not know how to contact her, that they communicated with her less than once a year, or that she had died (not shown). In contrast, 10% did not know how to contact their father, another 8% said they communicated with him less than once a year, and 5% said he was deceased, for a total of 23% who had virtually no contact with their father. An additional 6% communicated with their father less than once a month but at least once a year.

At the time of the survey,, 31% of the minors were working full-time or part-time, and 32% had never been employed. They appeared to represent all socioeconomic classes. At least 19% of the households in which the minors lived received some form of public assistance or Medicaid. Twenty-six percent of their mothers had not graduated from high school, while 44% had attended college.

Forty-four percent of the minors identified their religion as Protestant and 30% as Catholic; 17% were born-again or evangelical Christians. These percentages are roughly similar to those found for women of all ages in an earlier national survey of abortion patients.[\[15\]](#) Seventy percent of the minors said that they attended church services; 27% did so every Week. Sixty-three percent reported that their mother attended services.

One minor in five had been pregnant previously, including 9% who had given birth. Among those who had had one or more prior pregnancies, 53% reported having had an abortion, 41% a birth and 12% a miscarriage.

### **Minors and Their Parents**

To put into context the minor's and her family's responses to a pregnancy, we included in the questionnaire a number of items about the minor's relationship with her parents and about her perception of their attitude toward her sexual behavior.\* As Table 2 shows, 49% of the respondents said that they were "very close" to their mother, and an additional 37% that they were "somewhat close." Only 20% of the respondents reported a "very close" relationship with their father.

Although half of the teenagers said they felt very close to their mother, only 24% said they could talk "very freely" with her about their feelings, problems and fears, and only 21% said they could talk "very freely" about sexual issues. The proportions who reported being able to talk very freely to their father about these issues were much smaller (5% and 4%, respectively). Overall, 48% said that before they became pregnant (this time), their mother knew that they were sexually active, but only 19% believed that their father knew.

Whether or not a respondent said that her parents knew before finding out about the

pregnancy that she had had sex, we asked her to check off items on a list that described her parents' attitude toward her sexual activity. (Respondents could choose more than one answer.) Thirty-four percent of the minors said their mother thought they should not have sex, and 25% said she left the decision up to them. Forty-two percent of the minors said their mother encouraged them to use birth control; in some cases, the mother did not approve of the daughter having sex, but thought that if the daughter did have sex she should use birth control. Among those who knew how their mother felt about their sexual activity, 9% said that their mother had conveyed both attitudes (not shown).

Almost half of the respondents who said their mother left the decision about whether to have sex up to them also indicated that their mother encouraged them to use birth control, while only a few said their mother disapproved of their having sex. Thus, the minors who said their mother left decisions on sexual activity up to them may have meant that their mother accepted their being sexually active or that she at least did not express open disapproval. It is surprising that 19% of the daughters did not know what their mother's attitude was.

The minors were much more likely to believe that their father disapproved of their sexual activity. When the 59% who had little or no contact with their father or who did not know their father's attitude were omitted, 69% of the respondents said their father believed that they should not have sex. The comparable figure for mothers was 43%. Both the fathers and the mothers who knew that their daughter had had sex were much more likely to be perceived as encouraging use of birth control than were all parents.

One reason for the differences between the minors' relationship with their mother and their relationship with their father is that only 43% lived with their father, while 84% lived with their mother. Therefore, when the sample for Table 2 is limited to minors who lived with one or both of their parents, the differences between the minors' relationship with their mother and their relationship with their father are somewhat reduced for three of the six variables in the table (feeling close to the parent, freely talking about feelings, and a parent's knowing that the minor had had sex), but they remain very large. Daughters who lived with their father were more likely than all respondents to say that their father believed they should not have sex (47% vs. 29%), and they saw their father as more disapproving of their sexual activity than their mother (47% vs. 38%).

To investigate the extent to which family pathology or fear of family violence might discourage minors from involving their parents in their pregnancy outcome decision, we asked the respondents whether they had concerns about any of four kinds of problems happening in their home, either because such a problem had occurred or because they thought it might occur. We asked these questions before we asked about the pregnancy or parental knowledge of the pregnancy.

Although 72% of the respondents indicated no concerns about any of these problems

(not shown), 8% of minors were concerned that their mother might drink too much or use drugs, 15% had the same concern about their father, 11% were worried about physical violence between their parents and 14% worried about violence between themselves and their parents. Eighteen percent reported concerns because one or more of these problems had already occurred, and an additional 10% were concerned that one or more might occur.

### **Initial Intentions and Decisions**

A minor's initial reaction to becoming pregnant depended in part on whether the pregnancy was intended. Ninety-one percent of the minors who obtained an abortion reported that they had not wanted to become pregnant (not shown). Another 2% of respondents said that they had been forced to have intercourse, 2% reported that they had wanted to become pregnant and 5% were not sure about their original intentions.

Slightly more than half (56%) of the minors had initially wanted an abortion when they discovered the pregnancy; 44% had been so certain that they immediately decided on this option. Sixteen percent had at first wanted to continue the pregnancy, and 28% had not initially known what they wanted to do. More than two-thirds (68%) decided on the abortion within two weeks of discovering they were pregnant.

### **Parental Knowledge**

Most of the minors had suspected or discovered their pregnancy without their parents' knowing about it. At the time of the abortion, however, 61% of respondents indicated that one or both of their parents knew about the pregnancy; this included 45% who had told at least one parent (Table 3, page 200).

When faced with the question of whether to involve one or both of their parents, 43% of the minors had responded by telling their mother. Not all of the others, however, had kept their mother from knowing about the pregnancy. Ten percent said their mother had been told by someone else, such as a relative, doctor or clinic staff member; this figure included 2% who either said they did not know who had told their mother or did not answer the question (not shown).

Six percent said their mother had found out in some other way. Although the questionnaire did not ask how the mother had found out, our experience during pretesting suggests that some mothers suspected that something was different and confronted their daughter, who was then unable to deny that she was, or might be, pregnant. In some of these cases, the daughter may have wanted her mother to find out. Similarly, in many of the cases in which the parents were told by a physician or by clinic staff, they were presumably notified with the daughter's consent.[\*]

Only 12% of the respondents had told their father about the pregnancy. Nine percent of the fathers had been told by the minor's mother or stepmother and 4%, by someone else; 1% had found out in some other way. Thus, only 26% of all fathers-or

32% if those who are deceased or contacted less than once a year are excluded-knew about the pregnancy. Among fathers who lived with their daughter, that proportion was 38%. Only 2% of the respondents said their father knew but their mother did not (not shown).

Most of the mothers who knew about the pregnancy apparently agreed with their daughter's judgment not to tell her father (not shown). Of the minors whose mother knew and whose father was living, 57% believed that neither their mother nor anyone else had told their father. Among minors who lived with their mother but not their father, 79% said their father had not been told. Even among minors who lived with both parents and whose mother knew about the pregnancy, 33% said their father had not been informed about the pregnancy by their mother or anyone else. In some cases, of course, the daughter may not have been aware that the mother had told the father.

If a parent knew about the pregnancy, he or she almost always knew that the daughter was having an abortion. Only 0.3% of the minors said one or both parents were aware of the pregnancy but that neither knew about the abortion.\*

As Table 3 shows, the minor's age had a strong effect on whether the parents knew about the pregnancy and abortion and on how they had found out. The younger the minor, the more likely it was that she had told her mother about the abortion; 55% of minors aged 14 or younger had told their mother, in contrast to 40% of minors aged 17. An additional 33% of minors aged 14 or younger said their mother had learned of the pregnancy from someone other than themselves or had found out about it without being told. In contrast, only 9% of the 17-year-olds said their mother had found out about the pregnancy from someone else or on her own.

The minor's age also had an impact on whether the father knew about the abortion and on how he had found out. The younger the daughter, the more likely her father was to know about the pregnancy, usually because he had been told by someone else. Partly because some of the minors (20%) did not know how to contact their father or because he was deceased, fewer fathers than mothers knew about their daughter's pregnancy. Among the minors younger than 15 who lived with their father or knew how to contact him, 59% said that their father knew about the pregnancy.

Few of the youngest minors had the abortion without the knowledge of either parent; the proportion increased from 10% of those aged 14 or younger to 49% of those aged 17.

In addition to being older, the minors in our sample who chose not to tell their parents and who avoided their finding out about the pregnancy differed from the other respondents in several respects (not shown). They were more likely than those whose parents knew about the pregnancy to be white (64% vs. 49%) and to live with both parents (43% vs. 35%) or with neither parent (15% vs. 9%). One of the largest differences was by employment; 43% of minors whose parents did not know were

employed full-time or part-time, compared with 23% of those whose parents knew. The minors whose parents did not know were more likely to be Catholic (38% vs. 26%) and less likely to be Protestant (35% vs. 41%), although there was little difference in the frequency of their church attendance or their mothers' church attendance or in the proportion who considered themselves to be born-again or evangelical Christians.

Within the group of minors whose parents knew about the abortion, there were differences between those who had told their parents and those whose parents had found out in some other way (not shown). Those whose parents had found out without being told were more likely than those who had told their parents to be younger than 17 (77% vs. 60%), black (49% vs. 33%), not Catholic (81% vs. 72%), never pregnant before (86% vs. 79%) and never employed (45% vs. 36%).

It is not surprising that younger, less experienced minors would be less able or less motivated to keep their parents from finding out about their pregnancy. Others who knew about the pregnancy may have found it more appropriate to involve a parent than they would have if the minor had been older. Nevertheless, minors who did not tell their parents, but whose parents found out anyway, were more likely than those who told their parents to say that there had been physical violence between themselves and their parents (13% vs. 4%) or that they were concerned that there might be such violence (10% vs. 6%).

### Regression Results

The interrelationships among the variables are not clear from the above findings; for example, a black mother may have been more likely than a mother of another race to know about her daughter's pregnancy because the daughter was younger or because the mother was more likely to be single. We used logistic regression analysis to identify the factors most closely associated with parental knowledge and the relationships among the factors. Three dependent variables were examined: whether the minor had told one or both parents about her pregnancy, whether one or both parents had found out without being told by the minor, and whether one or both parents knew about the pregnancy, regardless of how they had found out.

The explanatory variables examined included all social and demographic background variables measured, plus perceived closeness to parents, feeling free to discuss feelings and sexual issues with parents, concerns about various problems in the home, whether the parents knew before the pregnancy occurred that their daughter was sexually active, their anticipated or actual reactions to that knowledge, whether the pregnancy was intended and what the minor initially wanted to do about the pregnancy. Most of the variables used were categorical or dichotomous; the exceptions, which were treated as continuing variables, were age, the four questions about how freely the minors could discuss feelings and sexual issues with each parent ("very freely" =3, "somewhat freely"=2, "not freely"=1; those with no contact with a given parent were also coded as 1), and the questions on closeness to each

parent (scored in the same way as the questions about the ability to freely discuss feelings and sexual issues).

When the social and demographic variables were entered stepwise into the regression equations, seven were found to be significantly associated with one or more of the dependent variables, including a dichotomous variable constructed from the interaction between two background variables--the minor's being Catholic and her mother's attending church at least once a week. All seven variables were then entered into each of the three models shown in Table 4; this allowed us to compare the effects of the other variables, using the same social and demographic variables as controls in each model.

As Table 4 shows, four background variables were significantly associated with telling one or both parents about the pregnancy: young age, not being employed, not being in school and living with at least one parent. In addition, the more freely a minor said she could discuss her feelings, problems and fears with her mother, the more likely she was to tell at least one parent about her pregnancy. Similarly, telling a parent was more frequent among respondents who could discuss sexual issues with their father, those whose mother encouraged them to use contraceptives and those whose mother left decisions about sexual activity up to them. On the other hand, minors were less likely to have told a parent if their father disapproved of their sexual activity.

Minors who had initially wanted to carry their pregnancy to term were more likely to have consulted a parent than were those who had initially wanted to have an abortion. Without information on all pregnant minors, including those who give birth, we cannot say whether this is because pregnant minors who initially want to give birth tend to change their mind after consulting their parents or whether they are simply more likely to consult their parents.

When only social and demographic variables were entered into the model, two--living in a household that received public assistance and the combined variable of being a Catholic and having a mother who attended church at least once a week--were significantly associated with telling a parent, but their effects were reduced when other variables were included. The effect of being Catholic and having a mother who attended church frequently was reduced after the steps in which variables reflecting the minor's relationship with her mother--her ability to freely discuss feelings with her mother and her mother's encouragement of contraceptive use--were entered into the equation. This suggests that one reason pregnant Catholic minors whose mother frequently attended church may have hesitated to consult their mother about the pregnancy was because they could not discuss feelings and problems freely with their mother.

The second model in Table 4 shows the variables associated with one or both parents finding out about the pregnancy without either one being told by the daughter. Age had an even stronger effect in this model, perhaps because others who know about

the pregnancy of a young teenager think her parents should be told and because younger adolescents are less able and less motivated to keep such information from their mother. The parents of minors who were black, those of minors whose families were not receiving public assistance and those of minors who were not employed were more likely to have found out without the minor telling them. If the daughters felt they could discuss feelings with their father or sexual issues with their mother, the parents were less likely to find out from others or on their own. Closeness between daughters and their parents therefore appears to increase the probability that daughters will confide in their parents but not the probability that parents will discover a pregnancy in other ways.

Pregnant minors' concern about violence between themselves and their parents is associated with the parents finding out about the pregnancy. This relationship, however, may be spurious; it is possible that some of the respondents reported such concern because their parents had found out and violence, or threats of violence, had resulted. If a minor's initial reaction to the pregnancy had been to want a birth or if she had been unsure, the likelihood that a parent would discover the pregnancy from others was greater than if the minor had initially wanted an abortion.

The third dependent variable in Table 4, parents' knowledge about the pregnancy, includes both knowledge received from the daughter and that discovered in some other way. A parent was more likely to know about the pregnancy if the daughter was younger, black, not employed, not in school, or lived with at least one parent. A mother who attended church frequently and whose daughter was Catholic was less likely than other mothers to know- about the pregnancy, If the daughter was young and was not employed, her parents were more likely to know about the pregnancy, both because she was more likely to tell them and because they were more likely to find out in some other way; race was a factor only because black parents were more likely to find out without being told. Parents whose daughter did not live with them or was in school were less likely to know because she was less likely to tell them.

When only the social and demographic variables were included in the regression, parents were less likely to know about their daughter's pregnancy if she lived with them both. This relationship disappeared, however, when other variables, especially the father's disapproval of the daughter's sexual activity, were entered. This suggests that a minor living with both parents is deterred from telling about the pregnancy if she believes her father would disapprove of her having sex.

All but one of the relationship and attitude variables that predicted parental knowledge were associated with the daughter telling the parents. These include the degree to which the daughter felt she could discuss feelings and problems with her mother, her perception that her mother encouraged contraceptive use, her feeling that her mother left decisions about sex up to her and her perception that her father did not disapprove of her having sex. Surprisingly, parents were also more likely to know about the pregnancy if the daughter perceived her mother as disapproving of her having sex. Once other variables had been taken into account, whether the

parents knew in advance that their daughter was sexually active was not associated with their knowing about the pregnancy.

The probability that a parent knew was associated with the daughter's attitude toward the pregnancy. If abortion was her preferred outcome from the beginning, she was less likely to tell her parents and they were less likely to find out than if she was uncertain or if she initially wanted to continue the pregnancy. Parents were more likely to be involved if the minor became pregnant after being forced to have sex or if she was unsure whether she had wanted to become pregnant than if the pregnancy had been an accident resulting from voluntary intercourse.

### Reasons

Respondents were asked to check one or more reasons why they had or had not told each parent about the pregnancy. The list of possible reasons is shown in Table 5; respondents could also write in other reasons. The most commonly cited reason for telling their mother was that "I wouldn't have felt right not telling her," which was checked by 48% of the minors who had done so. Other common reasons for telling the mother were the need for assistance in deciding what to do about the pregnancy (41%), a desire for sympathy and moral support (34%) and the need for help in getting an abortion (32%). About one-fourth of those who had told their mother had thought she would find out anyway. One percent had told their mother because they had been encouraged to do so by the clinic or the doctor. The ranking of the reasons given for telling fathers was similar.

Adolescents younger than 16 were more likely than those who were older to say that they had needed their parents' help in deciding what to do about the pregnancy and that they had believed their mother would find out anyway. Younger women were less likely than older women to say they had told their father because it wouldn't have felt right not to do so.

The most common reasons for not telling a parent regarded the relationship between the minor and the parent and the minor's concern about what the parent thought of her. The minors' most frequently cited reasons for not telling their mother were the desire not to disappoint her (73%), the fear that she would be angry (55%) and not wanting her to know that they had had sex (32%). The proportions who cited those reasons for not telling the father were 60%, 51% and 38%, respectively. Thirty-two percent of those who had not told their mother and 28% of those who had not told their father mentioned fear of being pressured to stop seeing their boyfriend.

Twenty-five percent of the minors who had not told their mother and 12% of those who had not told their father said that their parent was already under too much stress. The most common sources of stress mentioned for both mothers and fathers were related to family, work, finances and health. The desire to avoid causing problems between the parents or between the parent and stepparent was cited by 20% as the reason for not telling their mother and by 24% as the reason for not telling their

father

Some respondents said they had not told their mother because they had feared pressure to leave home (18%), other punishment (15%) or being beaten (6%). Among those who had not told their father, those proportions were 13%, 12% and 7%, respectively. Others had been afraid that their mother or their father would try to make them continue the pregnancy (14% and 8%, respectively) or have an abortion (5% and 4%, respectively); in some of these cases, this expectation proved to be correct. The most commonly written-in answers were that someone else had already told the mother or father, that the respondent hadn't wanted to worry her mother, and that she had minimal communication with her father.

### Parents' Reactions to the Pregnancy

- [\*] Initial reaction. A teenager may be confronted with a variety of reactions--and often several reactions at the same time when her parents find out that she is pregnant. In our study, the respondents were asked to report each parent's reaction to learning about the minor's pregnancy. They were given a list of possible reactions and were asked to check any that applied.

As Table 6 shows, the most commonly reported reaction among mothers when they learned of their daughter's pregnancy was disappointment (49%). Substantial proportions of minors reported that their mother had been upset (43%), understanding (45%) or supportive (43%). Two percent reported that their mother had been happy about the pregnancy, and 3% said they did not know what their mother's reaction had been.

According to the minors' reports, the pattern of the fathers' reactions to their daughter's pregnancy was similar to that of the mothers' reactions, but the fathers were far more likely than the mothers to be angry about the pregnancy (36% vs. 19%). The mothers and fathers were almost equally likely to be upset or disappointed about the pregnancy.

Both mothers and fathers were more likely to be angry, upset or disappointed and less likely to be supportive or understanding if they had found out about the pregnancy without being told by their daughter. Thirty-one percent of the mothers who had found out in some other way were angry, compared with 14% of those who had been told by their daughter; in contrast, 34% of those who had found out were supportive, compared with 47% of those who had been told by their daughter. There were similar differences in the fathers' reactions. The more negative reactions of parents who had found out may reflect the correct judgment of the daughters who had avoided telling them; it may also reflect the parents' disappointment that their daughter had not confided in them.

- Discussion of options. To assess the role of parents in their daughter's pregnancy outcome decision, we asked minors whose parents knew about the pregnancy to

indicate all of the options they had discussed with their mother and those they had discussed with their father. Besides abortion, the checklist included four options the minor would have had if she had chosen to give birth--giving the baby up for adoption, or keeping the baby and either living at home, getting married or living on her own.

Seven percent of the minors whose mother knew about the pregnancy and 30% of those whose father knew did not have any discussion with the parent about what options they could or should choose (Table 6). Daughters who had told their parents about the pregnancy were more likely to have had discussions with them about these options than were daughters whose parents had found out about the pregnancy in some other way. Only 5% of the minors who had told their mother about the pregnancy reported that she had never discussed with them any of the ways in which they might handle the situation. This proportion was less than half the proportion among minors whose mother had found out about the pregnancy instead of being told (11%).

Similarly, 15% of the fathers who had been told about the pregnancy did not discuss any options with their daughter, compared with 43% of those who had found out. Because such a high proportion of fathers who had found out about the pregnancy had been told by the mothers, it is likely that fathers also relied on mothers to discuss options with the daughters. However, even fathers who had been told about the pregnancy by their daughter were less likely to have discussed the options with her than were the mothers.

Eighty-five percent of the mothers and 61% of the fathers had discussed the possibility of abortion with their daughter; only about half as many had discussed one or more of the options involved in having the baby (45% and 31%, respectively, not shown). The birth options most commonly considered in conversations with the mothers were living at home with the baby (28%) and placing the baby for adoption (19%). Smaller proportions of the respondents reported having discussed getting married (10%) or having the baby and living on their own (9%). Nine percent of the mothers and 9% of the fathers had discussed only the possibility of the daughter having the birth.

- Options parents favored. Respondents were asked which option was initially favored by each parent who knew and which option that parent currently favored. Sixty-three percent of mothers initially believed that the minor should have an abortion, while only 14% initially thought she should have the baby (Table 6). Mothers who found out about the pregnancy were somewhat more likely to favor abortion than those who had been told by their daughter.

By the time of the abortion, only 7% of the mothers and 8% of the fathers still wanted their daughter to continue the pregnancy. Some of the minors whose parents still favored continuing the pregnancy reported that their parents nevertheless supported the decision to have an abortion. The respondents were aware of very little

opposition to their decision: Only small proportions indicated that they lacked support from their mother (5%) or their father (6%). In about two-thirds of the cases in which one parent disapproved of the decision, the other parent approved if that parent knew about it (not shown). Opposition known to the minors was about the same among mothers and fathers who had found out as among those who had been told about the pregnancy.

- Time needed to make the decision. Respondents were asked how much time had elapsed between their initial suspicion that they were pregnant and their decision to have an abortion. A large minority (44%) had decided right away and an additional 13% had decided within a week (not shown). For some, however, the decision was evidently more difficult; 21% said it had taken more than four weeks.
- Parental involvement was associated with later decision-making: Of the minors whose parents did not know about the pregnancy, 54% had decided right away that they would seek an abortion, compared with 39% of those who had told their parents and 33% of those whose parents had found out. Needing more than four weeks to decide was most common if the parents had found out (32%) and least common if parents were unaware (12%).

The causal relationships in these results are not clear. Minors who were most unsure of what they wanted were more likely to consult their parents, and the uncertainty may have been the cause of the delay. However, parental involvement may have made it more difficult for some minors to reach a decision or required more time if some were induced to change from favoring birth to favoring abortion.

- Consequences. Some of the consequences of parental knowledge of the pregnancy are shown in Table 7, which indicates the proportion of minors who checked off each result listed. Forty-five percent of the minors whose parents knew about the pregnancy had experienced at least one of these consequences after their parents learned of the pregnancy; the most common was an increased level of stress for the parents (25%).
- The second most common result mentioned was that "they are making me have an abortion (11%)." Because it is accepted practice among abortion providers to deny services to an unwilling patient, this response presumably did not mean that the parents used physical coercion; parents may have used psychological pressure or refused to provide the support, the respondent would need to have and care for a baby. Among the other results the minors checked were being made to feel uncomfortable living at home (10%) and being forced to stop seeing their boyfriend (7%). Three percent mentioned at least one of the following more severe results: harm to the parents' health, physical violence in the home, being forced to leave home and being beaten.

The minors whose parents had found out about the pregnancy were more likely to have experienced at least one of the results listed than were those who had told their parents (58% vs. 40%). Moreover, the proportion of minors who experienced each

result listed in Table 7 was higher among those whose parents had found out about the pregnancy than among those who had told their parents. It is likely that minors who avoided telling their parents were motivated to keep the pregnancy a secret partly because they anticipated such problems if the parents found out.

While 8% of the respondents who had told one or both parents about the pregnancy reported that their parents were making them have an abortion, the parents who had found out about the pregnancy were more than twice as likely to force the minor to have an abortion (18%). This difference probably reflects the fact that the minors whose parents had found out about the pregnancy were also those who were most likely to have desired pregnancy and to have initially wanted a baby. Indeed, they may not have intended to tell their parents about the pregnancy until later precisely because they knew they would be forced to have an abortion.

The minors who reported that their parents were making them have an abortion were more likely than the other respondents to report that they had intended to become pregnant or were unsure about whether they had wanted to do so (21% vs. 6%, not shown). Forty-eight percent of those who said their parents were forcing them to have an abortion said that when they had first learned they were pregnant they had wanted to have the baby; only 14% of all other minors said that they had initially wanted to continue the pregnancy. They were also less likely to report that they had not initially known what they wanted to do (18% vs. 28%).

The minors who reported that their parents were making them have an abortion differed from all other respondents in a number of other ways. They tended to be younger--half were aged 15 or younger, compared with one-quarter of all the other respondents. They were also more likely than the other respondents to be black (61% vs. 30%), to be part of a family that was receiving public assistance or Medicaid (31% vs. 19%) and to live only with their mother (57% vs. 45%).

### **Involvement of Others**

- Social support. All minors reported that at least one person--a relative, a friend or a professional--had taken part in the decision process or had helped them arrange the abortion.[\*] As Table 8 shows, 81% reported that at least one adult (defined as a person aged 21 or older) had been involved; that proportion was 90% among minors younger than 16 and 80% among those aged 16-17 (not shown). Among those whose parents knew about the pregnancy, 99% reported the involvement of at least one adult; for 95%, one of the adults was their mother. Even among those whose parents did not know about the pregnancy, 52% reported adult involvement.

Twenty-four percent of all minors consulted a professional, such as a teacher or counselor at school or a physician or nurse; 22% of those whose parents were unaware of the pregnancy did so. Some reported the involvement of relatives besides their parents (14%), adult friends (13%) or a boyfriend aged 21 or older (13%, not

shown).

Aside from parents, the individual most likely to have been involved was the minor's boyfriend; 78% of our sample said their boyfriend had participated in making the decision or getting the abortion. In fact, a minor's boyfriend was more than three times as likely as her father to be involved. Among those whose parents did not know about the pregnancy, 89% reported that their boyfriend was involved. More than half (54%) of the respondents were assisted by a friend younger than 21 who was not her boyfriend (not shown); friends were more likely to be involved if the minor had not told her parents.

- Influences on the decision. More than half of the minors (54%) reported that someone had attempted to persuade them to have an abortion, and 40% said that someone had tried to convince them to continue the pregnancy (Table 8). Attempts at persuading the minor to have an abortion were most likely to have come from her mother (26%), her boyfriend (27%) or a friend (21%). Attempts at persuasion to have the birth were most likely to come from the minor's boyfriend (20%) or a friend (19%); minors younger than 16 were more likely than older minors to have been urged to continue the pregnancy. We speculate that the friends of older minors were more likely than those of the younger ones to realize that parenthood entails considerable responsibility and were therefore less likely to advise it.

The parents of the minors in our sample were more likely to have tried to persuade their daughter to have an abortion than they were to have tried to convince her to continue the pregnancy, especially if she was younger than 16. However, because our sample included only minors who had an abortion, we cannot generalize these results to the parents of all pregnant teenagers. Some parents whose daughter is pregnant probably try to persuade her to continue the pregnancy and are successful. Similarly, among all minors who become pregnant, some undoubtedly decide to continue the pregnancy even though their parents attempt to persuade them to have an abortion.

Mothers who had found out about the pregnancy were more likely to try to persuade their daughter to have an abortion than were those who had been told by their daughter (49% vs. 40%) and less likely to urge her to continue the pregnancy (8% vs. 12%, not shown). Regardless of how they had learned about the pregnancy, however, parents who knew about it were more likely to have tried to persuade the minor to have an abortion than they were to have recommended continuing the pregnancy.

Only 2% of respondents reported that the staff of the abortion facility had tried to persuade them to have an abortion; that proportion was not significantly different from the 1% who said the staff had tried to persuade them to continue the pregnancy.

When asked who had been most helpful to them in making their decision, 25% of minors reported that they had not needed anyone's help; this proportion was

relatively constant across the parental knowledge groups and respondent age-groups shown in Table 8, with the exception of the youngest minors whose parents knew about the pregnancy (9%). Six percent of the minors reported that no one had been helpful to them in making their decision to have an abortion; this response was more common among those whose parents knew about the pregnancy (7%) than among those whose parents did not know (4%).

Among those whose parents knew about the pregnancy, the largest proportion cited their mother as the person who was most helpful (35%). Those whose parents did not know were most likely to identify their boyfriend or another friend as most helpful (38% and 21%, respectively). Overall, only 2-4% mentioned their father, sister, brother or another relative. Clinic staff and other professionals were rarely mentioned.

- Assistance in obtaining the abortion. Almost all the minors had obtained social and financial support in getting an abortion. All but 4% were accompanied by someone when they came to the clinic (Table 8). Forty-one percent were accompanied by their mother (67% of those whose mother knew about the pregnancy), 37% by their boyfriend and 22% by a friend who was not their boyfriend. If a parent did not know about the pregnancy, the minor was most likely to be accompanied by her boyfriend (58%) or a friend (39%). Among minors whose parents knew about the pregnancy, 80% of those younger than 16 were accompanied by their mother, compared with 60% of those aged 16 or older. Of those whose parents knew about the pregnancy, only 23% came with their boyfriend.

Half of the minors reported that their boyfriend was paying at least part of the cost of the abortion. Those whose parents knew about the pregnancy were more likely to have received help in paying for the abortion from their parents than from their boyfriend (61% and 34%, respectively). Among minors whose parents did not know about the pregnancy, 76% reported that their boyfriend was helping pay for the abortion, and 43% reported that they themselves were paying at least part of the cost.

Minors aged 16-17 were more likely to pay for the abortion themselves than were those who were younger. Among those whose parents knew about the pregnancy, the older minors were more likely than the younger minors to receive help from their boyfriend; the parents of the younger minors, however, were more likely than those of the older ones to help pay their abortion costs.

In states where Medicaid covered abortion services, it paid the abortion costs for 22% of the minors (not shown). The younger minors were somewhat more likely to use Medicaid to pay for the abortion than were the 16-17-year-olds.

## Discussion

The question of whether minors having an abortion should be required to inform or obtain the consent of one or both parents is being actively debated in state

legislatures and in Congress. One of the points on which proponents and opponents of parental involvement legislation disagree is whether such legislation would be helpful or harmful to minors and their families. Our study of more than 1,500 unmarried minors having an abortion in states without parental involvement requirements provides some useful information on four questions related to the effects of parental involvement requirements on pregnant minors and their families.

- Are there large numbers of minors obtaining an abortion without parental knowledge who would benefit from parental involvement because they need assistance in making the decision or in obtaining safe abortion services? In this study, only 39% of the minors having an abortion did so without the knowledge of either parent. These tended to be the oldest of the respondents: Fifty-four percent were aged 17, and only 2% were younger than 15. Many showed other signs of maturity, such as holding a job (43%), living apart from their parents (15%) or already having a baby (9%). Thirteen percent had had a previous abortion and could be expected to understand the nature and consequences of the decision.

If one eliminated from the study the minors whose parents were aware of the abortion, those with signs of maturity, those who would have been at risk if they had told their parents and those who had involved another adult, only 7% were left for whom one might argue that obligatory parental knowledge would have been helpful, including only 2% who were younger than 16. Thus, relatively few appear to have been in a situation in which needed adult or parental assistance was lacking.

The lack of parental involvement did not mean that these minors had no access to help from others. Although most were sure when they learned they were pregnant that they wanted an abortion, all had discussions with or assistance from a friend, boyfriend, relative or someone other than the staff of the abortion facility. More than half (52%) involved an adult other than the staff of the abortion facility, including 15% who involved an adult relative or stepparent. Twenty-two percent consulted a professional before going to the abortion facility, usually someone at another clinic or office or at school. These adults could presumably offer mature guidance and assistance to the minor, and most could notify a minor's parents if they saw an important reason to do so. In fact, 10% of the mothers found out about their daughter's pregnancy from someone else; this group included 20% of those whose daughter was younger than 15. All but 7% of the minors whose parents did not know about the pregnancy were accompanied to the abortion clinic, many of them by more than one person.

- What is the danger that obligatory parental notification would cause harm to the adolescent or disrupt family relationships? Our data suggest that informing parents of a daughter's pregnancy would produce negative reactions in some families. Although parents whose daughters told them about the pregnancy were understanding and supportive as often as they were upset and disappointed, those who found out without being told by their daughter were probably more typical of parents who would be informed of a pregnancy as a result of legislative

requirements. Parents who found out were much more likely to be upset than supportive and were more likely to be angry than were parents whose daughter told them about the pregnancy.

Among minors whose parents found out about the pregnancy, 58% reported one or more adverse results of parental knowledge. While it is difficult to ascertain from responses to a questionnaire the seriousness of the problems reported, a minimum of 6% of these minors appear to have suffered relatively harmful consequences- physical violence in the home, being beaten, being forced to leave home or having the health of their parents affected. Ten percent said knowledge of the pregnancy caused problems between their parents or between a parent and stepparent. These consequences were two to four times as common when the parents discovered the pregnancy as when they were told by their daughter.

These results suggest that minors are often accurate in their predictions of parental reactions and that if all parents had been informed when their minor daughter became pregnant, serious problems would have resulted in perhaps 6% of the families who are at present unaware of the daughter's abortion. The actual percentage could be higher because the group whose parents found out included some minors who probably wanted their parents to find out and some who were not highly motivated to avoid discovery. Moreover, if the details were known, some of the other problems mentioned by minors might be considered serious; for example, some of the minors who said they were uncomfortable living at home may have suffered a major breach with their parents that will affect their self-esteem and financial support.

There is no way to determine exactly which minors would be harmed by obligatory parental notification. Based on what the minors themselves said, 30% of those who did not tell their parents would be at risk: These minors feared physical violence between themselves and their parents (in many cases because it had already occurred), or they were afraid of being forced to leave home.

- How frequently do abortion clinics put pressure on adolescents to have an abortion and how often do parents apply pressure or coercion to force their daughter either to carry a pregnancy to term or to have an abortion? Among the minors in our sample whose parents did not know about the pregnancy, 30% reported that someone had tried to persuade them to continue the pregnancy, while 45% said someone had tried to persuade them to have an abortion. Our survey findings indicate little cause for concern about pressure from abortion facilities. Of respondents who were having an abortion without parental knowledge, only 1% said that someone at the clinic had tried to persuade them to have an abortion, and the same proportion said that someone at the clinic had tried to persuade them to continue the pregnancy. Since attempts at persuasion do not necessarily constitute pressure, incidents of clinic pressure on minors appear to be rare.

Pressure from parents, on the other hand, was reported much more frequently. Of the

minors whose parents had found out about the pregnancy, 18% said that their parents were making them have an abortion. More of these respondents had initially wanted a birth when they discovered their pregnancy. While the responses may not indicate true coercion, parents clearly exert a strong influence over their minor daughter's pregnancy resolution decision. If all parents whose daughter carried a pregnancy to term were aware of the pregnancy early in gestation, more of the daughters might be persuaded or pressured by the parents into having an abortion.

Similarly, if all minors having an abortion informed their parents, a small proportion would undoubtedly be persuaded or forced to carry the pregnancy to term. (It appears that the proportion would be small, because only 14% of those who had not told their mother said they had not told her for fear they would be forced to continue the pregnancy, and not all of these would have been forced to have the baby. In fact, 14% of the mothers who did know about their daughter's pregnancy initially wanted her to continue the pregnancy. Still, they did not block the abortion.)

- What is the effect of requiring notification or consent of both parents rather than only one parent? Six states have laws in effect that require the notification (Arkansas, Idaho, Minnesota and Utah) or consent (Massachusetts and North Dakota) of both parents of a minor seeking an abortion. Of these, only North Dakota makes an exception for a divorced noncustodial parent. Two-parent laws risk more adverse impact than those involving only one parent: Our study indicates that, in the absence of requirements, only about a quarter of the fathers of minors know about their daughter's pregnancy. This suggests that most minors who do involve a parent feel that involving their father would not be helpful. Fathers who find out about the pregnancy without being told by their daughter tend to be peripheral to the decision-making process: In our study, 43% of these fathers did not discuss any options with their daughter.

In addition to risking harm to the minor, a requirement that the father be informed would overrule the judgment of most mothers and pose an unknown risk to family relationships. In our study, the majority of the mothers who knew about their daughter's pregnancy (57%) decided not to tell the father. Even in families with both biological parents present, 33% of the mothers who knew did not tell the minor's father. Thus, two-parent requirements have important implications for the relationship between the parents as well as the relationship between parents and daughters.

In conclusion, while a majority of unmarried minors seeking an abortion would be unaffected by laws requiring notification or consent of one parent, a minority would be exposed to risk of significant (Continued on page 213) harm or coercion to resolve the pregnancy in a way contrary to what the minor would choose for herself. Laws requiring the involvement of both parents affect many more minors and conflict with the judgment of most mothers that the father should not be involved. Our data provide little evidence of need for blanket parental involvement requirements, given that among the minors whose parents were unaware of the

abortion, more than half were 17 years old, many showed other signs of maturity, and a majority involved an adult other than a parent. An alternative approach that minimizes the risk of harmful consequences would be to allow counseling by a professional as a substitute for parental involvement, a strategy that has been adopted by Connecticut and Maine.

[\*] The states that require consent of one or both parents are Alabama, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Wisconsin and Wyoming. Those requiring notification of one or both parents are Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, Utah and West Virginia. In addition, Maryland has passed a law providing for one-parent notification with physician and court bypass; it is scheduled to be submitted to voter referendum in November 1992. For a detailed analysis of parental involvement laws, see P. Donovan, *Our Daughters' Decisions: The Conflict in State Law on Abortion and Other Issues*, The Alan Guttmacher Institute, New York, 1992.

[T] States with laws that are enjoined or are not being enforced are Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and Tennessee.

[dd]Some statutes state that abortion without parental involvement must be in the minor's best interest and some that parental involvement must not be in her best interest.

[s]The sample was drawn from abortion facilities in the District of Columbia and the following states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and -Wisconsin.

[\*] The questions on closeness and communication with parents were adapted, with permission, from questions developed by M. Resnick, R. Blum and T. Stark, Adolescent Health Program, University of Minnesota.

[\*] About 1% of minors were unsure whether their mother or father knew about the pregnancy. In the analysis, these were included with those whose parents were unaware, since the unsure minors had evidently not discussed the pregnancy with their parents or benefited from parental involvement.

[\*] Although the tables and text often refer to knowledge of the pregnancy, all statistics presented are based on knowledge of the pregnancy and the abortion; that is, the 0.3% of parents who know about the pregnancy but not about the abortion are counted as being unaware.

[\*] Having had a discussion with someone about the decision to have an abortion or how to go about getting an abortion, having had someone attempt to influence the decision, having had someone accompany them to the clinic, or having had someone help pay for the abortion.

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Table 1. Percentage distribution of U.S. minors having an abortion, by background characteristics, 1991

Characteristic	%
Age (N=1,519)	
<14	2
14	6
15	19
16	31
17	43
Race/ethnicity (N=1,472)	
White (non-Hispanic)	55
Black (non-Hispanic)	30
Hispanic	12
Asian or other	4
Household (N=1,517)	
Both biological parents	38
Biological mother only	46
Biological father only	5
Neither biological parent	12
Respondent's employment (N=1,457)	
Working full-time	2
Working part-time	29
Not employed but worked in the past	38
Never employed	32
Household receives public assistance or Medicaid (N=1,458)	
Yes	19
No	78
Don't know	3
Mother's education (N=1,275)	
<12 yrs.	26
12 yrs.	30
>12 yrs.	44

Religion (N=1,406)	
Protestant	44
Catholic	30
Jewish	1
Other	2
None	22
Born-again or evangelical Christian (N=1,345)	
Yes	17
No	83
Respondent's church attendance (N=1,446)	
>Once a week	27
About once a month	18
<Once a month	26
Never	30
Mother's church attendance (N=1,426)	
>Once a week	31
About once a month	13
<Once a month	20
Never	37

Prior pregnancy[d] (N=1,473) Birth 9 Abortion 11 Miscarriage 3 None 79 Total 100  
 1-Percentages total more than 100% because more than one answer could be checked. Note: Ns in all tables except those for regression analyses are weighted to reflect the proportion of nonwhites among minors having abortions in the states studied.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of U.S. minors having an abortion and of those who live with a parent, by indicators of relationship with parent, according to parent

Indicator	All minors	
	Mother	Father
Closeness to parent	(N=1,512)	(N=1,454)
Very close	49	20
Somewhat close	37	35
Not close	11	23
Little or no contact[+]	2	23
Talked to parent about feelings, problems and fears	(N=1,505)	(N=1,452)
Very freely	24	5
Somewhat freely	44	20
Not freely	29	52
Little or no contact[+]	2	23
Talked to parent about sexual issues	(N=1,506)	(N=1,434)
Very freely	21	4
Somewhat freely	29	11
Not freely	48	63
Little or no contact[+]	2	23

Parent knew before pregnancy that daughter had had sex	(N=1,510)	(N=1,495)
Yes	48	19
Not sure	16	11
No	31	46
Got pregnant the first time	4	2
Little or no contact[+]	2	23
Parent's attitude about daughter having sex[++]	(N=1,508)	(N=1,473)
Disapproved	34	29
Left it up to daughter	25	8
Unknown	19	37
Encouraged use of birth control	42	10
Little or no contact[+]	2	23
Parent's attitude if he or she knew daughter was having sex[+]	(N=718)	(N=285)
Disapproved	29	36
Left it up to daughter	33	24
Unknown	10	26
Encouraged use of birth control	58	31
Total	100	100
Indicator	Those who lived with parent	
	Mother	Father
Closeness to parent	(N=1,267)	(N=631)
Very close	52	31
Somewhat close	38	48
Not close	11	21
Little or no contact[+]	na	na
Talked to parent about feelings, problems and fears	(N=1,262)	(N=630)
Very freely	25	7
Somewhat freely	46	30
Not freely	29	63
Little or no contact[+]	na	na
Talked to parent about sexual issues	(N=1,262)	(N=628)
Very freely	21	4
Somewhat freely	30	14
Not freely	49	82
Little or no contact[+]	na	na
Parent knew before pregnancy that daughter had had sex	(N=1,258)	(N=642)
Yes	47	25
Not sure	16	14
No	33	58
Got pregnant the first time	5	3
Little or no contact[+]	na	na

Parent's attitude about daughter having sex[++]	(N=1,256)	(N=634)
Disapproved	38	47
Left it up to daughter	23	10
Unknown	19	40
Encouraged use of birth control	42	14
Little or no contact[+]	na	na
Parent's attitude if he or she knew daughter was having sex[+]	(N=592)	(N=158)
Disapproved	31	42
Left it up to daughter	31	22
Unknown	11	23
Encouraged use of birth control	57	32
Total	100	100

+Communications with parent less than once a year. (++)Percentages total more than 100% because more than one answer could be checked. Note: na=not applicable.

Table 3. Percentage distribution of minors, by parental knowledge of their abortion and source of parental knowledge, according to minor's age

Parental knowledge and source	All	<14	15
ONE OR BOTH PARENTS	(N=1,519)	(N=122)	(N=284)
Knew	61	90	74
Told by respondent	45	55	52
Found out[+]	15	35	22
Neither knew(++)	39	10	26
MOTHER	(N=1,519)	(N=122)	(N=284)
Knew	59	88	73
Told by respondent	43	55	49
Told by someone else	10	20	14
Found out	6	13	11
Did not know(++)	41	12	27
Not told	38	9	25
Mother deceased or could not be contacted	2	2	1
Respondent not sure	1	2	[21]
FATHER	(N=1,480)	(N=116)	(N=278)
Knew	26	45	28
Told by respondent	12	14	13
Told by someone	12	29	12
Found out	1	2	3
Did not know(++)	74	55	72
Not told	53	27	48
Father deceased or could not be contacted	20	26	23
Respondent not sure	1	2	1

Total	100	100	100
Parental knowledge and source	16	17	
ONE OR BOTH PARENTS	(N=467)	(N=647)	
Knew	59	51	
Told by respondent	43	42	
Found out[+]	16	8	
Neither knew(++)	41	49	
MOTHER	(N=467)	(N=647)	
Knew	58	49	
Told by respondent	41	40	
Told by someone else	11	6	
Found out	6	3	
Did not know(++)	42	52	
Not told	39	48	
Mother deceased or could not be contacted	2	3	
Respondent not sure	1	1	
FATHER	(N=454)	(N=632)	
Knew	26	21	
Told by respondent	12	12	
Told by someone	13	9	
Found out	1	1	
Did not know(++)	74	79	
Not told	53	60	
Father deceased or could not be contacted	20	18	
Respondent not sure	1	1	
Total	100	100	

+Neither was told, but one or both found out.

[21]Includes cases in which the respondent did not know if the parent had been [21]<0.5% of respondents.

Table 4. Logistic regression coefficients describing the effect of statistically significant variables on parents' knowledge of a minor's pregnancy (N=1,138)

Variable	Minor told one or both parents	One or both parents found out
Social and demographic		
Age	-.17*	-.39***
Black	-.09	.97***
Public assistance	.19	-.52*
Employed part-time or full-time	-.33*	-.62**
Not in school	.58*	-.03
Household[+]		
Mother only	-.08	.26
Father only	-.35	-.89

Neither parent	-.61*	-.30
Catholic whose mother attended church frequently	-.49	-.38
Family relationship		
Freedom to discuss feelings with mother	.89***	
Freedom to discuss feelings with father		-.52**
Freedom to discuss sex with mother		-.36**
Freedom to discuss sex with father	.38*	
Concern about violence between herself and her parents		.57*
Mother encouraged contraceptive use	.67***	
Mother left decision about sex up to daughter	.40*	
Mother disapproved of daughter's having sex		
Father disapproved of daughter's having sex	-.33*	
Pregnancy intention(++)		
Wanted pregnancy		
Was forced to have sex		
Unsure		
Initial reaction to pregnancy[21]		
Wanted birth	.83**	.72*
Unsure	.22	.51*
Constant	-.6051	5.2926
df	1,313 (1.121)	825 (1,123)

Variable	One or both parents were told or found out
Social and demographic	
Age	-.52***
Black	.66***
Public assistance	-.21
Employed part-time or full-time	-.62***
Not in school	.63*
Household[+]	
Mother only	.08
Father only	-.56
Neither parent	-.72**
Catholic whose mother attended church frequently	-.77**
Family relationship	
Freedom to discuss feelings with mother	.92***
Freedom to discuss feelings with father	
Freedom to discuss sex with mother	
Freedom to discuss sex with father	

Concern about violence between herself and her parents	
Mother encouraged contraceptive use	.92***
Mother left decision about sex up to daughter	.44*
Mother disapproved of daughter's having sex	.47**
Father disapproved of daughter's having sex	-.64***
Pregnancy intention[++]	
Wanted pregnancy	.13
Was forced to have sex	1.32*
Unsure	1.00*

Initial reaction to pregnancy[21] Wanted birth 1.43\*\*\* Unsure .54\*\* Constant 5.6683 df 1,178 (1,118) \*p<.05. \*\*p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001. (+)Reference category is two-parent household. (++)Reference category is pregnancy was an accident. [21] Reference category is initially wanted abortion. Notes: The social and demographic variables that were significant in any model were entered in all three. Other variables were included only if significant in a given model; missing values mean the variable was not entered into the model because it was not significant. The following additional variables were not significant in any of the models: Social and demographic--Hispanic origin, no contact with father, religion, church attendance, mother's church attendance, born-again or evangelical Christian, previous birth, previous abortion, mother graduated from high school, residence in metropolitan county and never-employed; Other---closeness to mother, closeness to father, concerned about financial problems in the family, concerned that mother drinks too much or uses drugs, concerned that father drinks too much or uses drugs, concerned about violence between the parents, mother already knew the respondent was sexually active, father already knew the respondent was sexually active, father encourages contraception, and father leaves the decision about having sex up to the respondent.

Table 5. Percentages of minors reporting specific reasons for telling or not telling parents about their pregnancy, by parent and daughter's age-group

Reason	Mother	<16	16-17
	All		
Minors who told parent	(N=621)	(N=195)	(N=426)
Wouldn't have felt right not telling parent	48	47	48
Needed parent to help me decide what to do	41	48	38
Thought parent would be sympathetic and give me moral support	34	31	35
Needed parent to help me get an abortion	32	34	32
Thought parent would find out anyway	23	30	20
Clinic or office encouraged me to tell parent	1	3	+
Clinic or office made me tell parent	+	1	+
Other	9	8	10

Minors who did not tell parent[++]	(N=761)	(N=170)	(N=591)
Didn't want to hurt or disappoint Parent	73	66	74
Thought parent would be angry with me	55	51	56
Didn't want parent to know I was having sex	32	38	31
Thought parent would try to make me stop seeing my boyfriend	32	37	30
Parent has too much stress already	25	24	26
Didn't need parent to help me decide what to do	23	16	24
Thought it would cause problems between parents or parent and stepparent	20	17	21
Thought parent would make me leave home	18	19	17
Thought I would be punished in other ways	15	18	14
Thought parent would try to make me continue the pregnancy	14	10	15
Thought I would be beaten	6	8	5
Thought parent would try to make me have an abortion	5	11	3
Other	12	13	12
Reason	Father		
	All	<16	16-17
Minors who told parent	(N=164)	(N=50)	(N=114)
Wouldn't have felt right not telling parent	39	21	47
Needed parent to help me decide what to do	35	46	30
Thought parent would be sympathetic and give me moral support	26	28	26
Needed parent to help me get an abortion	27	24	28
Thought parent would find out anyway	28	29	27
Clinic or office encouraged me to tell parent	1	+	1
Clinic or office made me tell parent	+	+	+
Other	5	5	5
Minors who did not tell parent	(N=917)	(N=219)	(N=698)
Didn't want to hurt or disappoint Parent	60	61	60
Thought parent would be angry with me	51	52	51
Didn't want parent to know I was having sex	38	44	36
Thought parent would try to make me stop seeing my boyfriend	28	34	27
Parent has too much stress already	12	16	11
Didn't need parent to help me decide what to do	24	20	26
Thought it would cause problems between parents or parent and stepparent	24	25	23
Thought parent would make me leave home	13	13	13
Thought I would be punished in other ways	12	15	11
Thought parent would try to make me			

continue the pregnancy	8	7	8
Thought I would be beaten	7	9	6
Thought parent would try to make me have an abortion	4	7	3
Other	18	19	18

+<0.5% of respondents. Excludes those whose parent was deceased or who had contact with the parent less than once a year. Note: More than one reason could be given.

Table 6. Percentages and Percentages minors reporting reactions to the pregnancy, by parent and how parent found out

Parent's reaction	Mother		
	Total	Told by daughter	Found out another way
PERCENTAGES			
Initial reactions+	(N=873)	(N=235)	(N=235)
Angry	19	14	31
Upset	43	40	52
Disappointed	49	46	58
Understanding	45	49	31
Supportive	43	47	34
Happy	2	2	1
Unknown to minor	3	3	4
Options discussed	(N=849)	(N=618)	(N=231)
None	7	5	11
Abortion	85	86	82
Birth/live at home	28	31	20
Birth/adoption	19	20	15
Birth/get married	10	11	6
Birth/live on her own	9	9	8
Abortion only	49	47	55
Birth only	9	9	7
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS			
Option parent first favored	(N=814)	(N=602)	(N=212)
Up to the minor	23	24	17
Abortion	63	61	72
Birth	14	15	11
Option parent currently favors	(N=734)	(N=540)	(N=193)
Up to the minor	10	11	7
Abortion	83	83	85
Birth	7	7	8
Reaction to minor's decision to have an abortion	(N=884)	(N=645)	(N=239)
Supported decision	87	86	88
Did not support decision	5	5	5
Did not know about decision	1	1	1
Unknown to minor	7	8	6
Total	100	100	100
Parent's reaction	Father		

	Total	Told by daughter	Found out another way
PERCENTAGES			
Initial reactions	(N=335)	(N=167)	(N=168)
Angry	36	28	44
Upset	45	39	52
Disappointed	53	45	61
Understanding	36	41	31
Supportive	41	45	37
Happy	2	3	0
Unknown to minor	0	0	0
Options discussed	(N=351)	(N=163)	(N=188)
None	30	15	43
Abortion	61	74	50
Birth/live at home	22	27	17
Birth/adoption	11	15	7
Birth/get married	8	11	4
Birth/live on her own	5	6	3
Abortion only	39	42	36
Birth only	9	11	7
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTIONS			
Option parent first favored	(N=299)	(N=157)	(N=142)
Up to the minor	26	23	30
Abortion	57	57	58
Birth	17	20	13
Option parent currently favors	(N=265)	(N=142)	(N=123)
Up to the minor	10	8	13
Abortion	82	83	81
Birth	8	9	7
Reaction to minor's decision to have an abortion	(N=382)	(N=177)	(N=205)
Supported decision	77	84	72
Did not support decision	6	5	7
Did not know about decision	2	1	4
Unknown to minor	15	11	17
Total	100	100	100

+Respondents could check more than one answer.

Table 7. Percentage of minors reporting various consequences of parents' knowledge of the pregnancy, by how parents found out

Consequence	Total (N=904)	One or both told by daughter (N=673)	Neither told but one or both found out (N=231)
Parents' stress increased	25	24	30
Parents making respondent have an abortion	11	8	18
Respondent uncomfortable living at home	10	7	19
Respondent forced to stop			

seeing boyfriend	7	4	14
Problems between respondent's mother and father or stepparent	6	5	10
Respondent punished	3	2	8
Health of parents suffered	1	1	2
Physical violence in home	1	+	2
Respondent forced to leave home	1	1	1
Respondent beaten	+	+	1
Other	4	5	3
One or more of the above	45	40	58

+<0,5% of respondents. Note: Respondents could check more than one answer.

Table 8. Percentage of minors who involved others in deciding on or arranging their abortion, by type of involvement and person involved, according to parental knowledge of the abortion and minor's age

Type of involvement and person involved	All	One or both parents knew Total	<16
Had any involvement(+)	(N=1,505)	(N=917)	(N=318)
Any person	100	100	100
Mother	58	95	98
Father	23	38	39
Sister or brother	26	31	30
Other relative, stepparent	14	18	22
Boyfriend	78	71	67
Friend	61	54	51
A professional(++)	24	26	28
Adult friend or acquaintance[21]	13	11	8
Any adult (not parents)	53	54	53
Any adult	81	99	100
Tried to persuade respondent to have an abortion	(N=1,320)	(N=797)	(N=285)
Someone tried	54	60	71
Mother	26	42	52
Father	9	16	20
Stepparent	2	3	4
Sister or brother	10	12	14
Boyfriend	27	24	29
Friend(s)	21	19	17
Someone at school	3	4	4
Someone at this clinic	2	2	4
Someone at another clinic	3	3	4
Priest, pastor or rabbi	++	++	1
Other	3	4	6
Tried to persuade respondent to continue the pregnancy	(N=1,320)	(N=797)	(N=285)
Someone tried	40	46	49
Mother	7	11	12
Father	3	4	4

Stepparent	1	2	3
Sister or brother	6	8	9
Boyfriend	20	24	25
Friend(s)	19	22	26
Someone at school	3	4	5
Someone at this clinic	1	2	2
Someone at another clinic	2	3	4
Priest, pastor or rabbi	++	1	1
Other	3	3	5

Who was most helpful in making the decision (N=1,346) (N=793) (N=260)

Mother	20	35	48
Father	2	4	3
Sister or brother	4	4	3
Other relative	3	3	6
Boyfriend	25	15	14
Friend	13	8	5
Someone at this clinic	++	++	++
Other	2	2	2
No one was helpful	6	7	10
Did not need help	25	23	9

Who accompanied the minor (N=1,441) (N=882) (N=306)

Came alone	4	3	2
Mother	41	67	80
Father	7	12	14
Stepparent	2	3	3
Sister or brother	7	8	6
Boyfriend	37	23	16
Friend	22	11	8
Other	8	8	11

Who helped pay (N=1,357) (N=831) (N=290)

Respondent	26	16	7
Parent	38	61	71
Boyfriend	50	34	24
Medicaid	13	14	16
Other	++	++	++

Type of involvement and person involved One or both parents knew 16-17 Neither parent Knew Total

Had any involvement++	(N=599)	(N=589)
Any person	100	100
Mother	94	na
Father	38	na
Sister or brother	31	20
Other relative, stepparent	15	10
Boyfriend	74	89
Friend	55	72
A professional+	25	22

Adult friend or acquaintance[21]	13	17
Any adult (not parents)	55	52
Any adult	99	52
Tried to persuade respondent to have an abortion	(N=512)	(N=522)
Someone tried	54	45
Mother	37	na
Father	13	na
Stepparent	3	++
Sister or brother	11	7
Boyfriend	22	31
Friend(s)	20	24
Someone at school	3	2
Someone at this clinic	1	1
Someone at another clinic	3	1
Priest, pastor or rabbi	0	0
Other	2	2
Tried to persuade respondent to continue the pregnancy	(N=512)	(N=522)
Someone tried	45	30
Mother	11	na
Father	5	na
Stepparent	1	++
Sister or brother	8	4
Boyfriend	24	14
Friend(s)	20	14
Someone at school	4	1
Someone at this clinic	1	1
Someone at another clinic	2	2
Priest, pastor or rabbi	++	0
Other	2	3
Who was most helpful in making the decision	(N=532)	(N=553)
Mother	28	na
Father	4	na
Sister or brother	4	5
Other relative	2	2
Boyfriend	16	38
Friend	9	21
Someone at this clinic	++	1
Other	2	2
No one was helpful	5	4
Did not need help	29	28
Who accompanied the minor	(N=576)	(N=559)
Came alone	3	7
Mother	60	na
Father	10	na
Stepparent	3	0
Sister or brother	9	6
Boyfriend	27	58
Friend	13	39
Other	6	7
Who helped pay	(N=541)	(N=526)

Respondent	21	43
Parent	56	na
Boyfriend	39	76
Medicaid	12	13
Other	++	++
Type of involvement and person involved	Neither parent knew <16	16-17
Had any involvement+	(N=86)	(N=503)
Any person	100	100
Mother	na	na
Father	na	na
Sister or brother	30	18
Other relative, stepparent	12	9
Boyfriend	93	89
Friend	70	72
A professional++	22	22
Adult friend or acquaintance[21]	16	17
Any adult (not parents)	47	52
Any adult	47	52
Tried to persuade respondent to have an abortion	(N=80)	(N=442)
Someone tried	50	44
Mother	na	na
Father	na	na
Stepparent	1	0
Sister or brother	9	7
Boyfriend	36	31
Friend(s)	24	24
Someone at school	3	2
Someone at this clinic	0	1
Someone at another clinic	1	2
Priest, pastor or rabbi	0	0
Other	4	2
Tried to persuade respondent to continue the pregnancy	(N=80)	(N=442)
Someone tried	40	28
Mother	na	na
Father	na	na
Stepparent	2	[21]
Sister or brother	5	3
Boyfriend	21	13
Friend(s)	21	13
Someone at school	0	1
Someone at this clinic	0	1
Someone at another clinic	2	2
Priest, pastor or rabbi	0	0
Other	2	3
Who was most helpful in making the decision	(N=85)	(N=468)
Mother	na	na

Father	na	na
Sister or brother	7	4
Other relative	1	2
Boyfriend	33	38
Friend	25	21
Someone at this clinic	0	1
Other	5	2
No one was helpful	5	4
Did not need help	25	29
Who accompanied the minor	(N=78)	(N=481)
Came alone	5	7
Mother	na	na
Father	na	na
Stepparent	0	0
Sister or brother	7	6
Boyfriend	59	58
Friend	37	40
Other	14	6
Who helped pay	(N=73)	(N=452)
Respondent	34	44
Parent	na	na
Boyfriend	76	76
Medicaid	19	12
Other	0	++

The person discussed the decision with the minor, discussed how to get an abortion, tried to persuade her in favor of birth or abortion, accompanied her to the clinic, or helped to pay for the abortion. An adult is defined as any person aged 21 or older. A professional is someone at school or at a clinic (other than the clinic at which the abortion was obtained), a priest, pastor or rabbi, or any other professional cited by the minor. [21]Includes minor's friends aged 21 or older, the boyfriend's parent(s), or a friend's parent(s). <0.5% of respondents. Notes: For each question, except who was most helpful, the respondent could check more than one answer; na=not applicable.

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By Stanley K. Henshaw and Kathryn Kost

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